

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Effective Communication in a Culturally Diverse Workplace

At its core, cultural diversity is about accepting and respecting people's differences and understanding that everyone is unique. The same can be said for communication. To do it well, you need to understand your audience and craft your message in a way that will make the most sense to them.

When that audience is culturally diverse, the challenge is to understand their differences and be sensitive to how your message will be received.

Four ways to communicate better in today's diverse workplace

1. **Use clear language.** When you are communicating with a culturally diverse audience, keep your language clear, concise and straightforward. Avoid jargon, slang terms, euphemisms and colloquial expressions. For example, you could say: That sales report was fantastic! Instead of: That sales report was a slam dunk!

2. **Understand differences in body language.** You may be surprised to learn that different cultures have very different practices when it comes to non-verbal forms of communication. For instance, in most countries, people do not greet each other by shaking hands, and some cultures find it disrespectful to engage in direct eye contact. Additionally, some cultures have different comfort levels when it comes to personal space and touching. When in doubt, leave at least one arm's length between you and your colleagues, and keep your hands to yourself.

3. **Practice reflective listening or paraphrasing.** When in conversation, paraphrasing or repeating the message back is a good habit to get into. This will help clarify meaning and eliminate issues that may surface as a result of misunderstanding. The same is true of written communication – paraphrase to clarify any doubts you may have.

4. **Be open and inclusive of other cultures.** Although it is natural to gravitate towards others who share our preferences and traditions, getting to know your fellow coworkers from culturally diverse backgrounds can help build relations, and open up your world to new experiences. Bear in mind that they may be new to this country and have challenges of their own, as they try to navigate a different language, customs and way of life.

Communicating effectively in a culturally diverse environment requires tact and sensitivity – valuable life skills to have. Find out more about communicating effectively in a diverse workplace through your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

How culturally diverse is the US?

- Without question, the United States is highly multicultural as a country, due to having drawn so many people from all parts of the world to live and work within its shores.
- The number of people in the US who speak a language other than English has more than doubled since 1980.
- English and Spanish are the most commonly spoken languages in the US followed by Chinese, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

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- According to the 2010 U.S. Census, White Americans (non-Hispanic/Latino and Hispanic/Latino) are the racial majority, with an 72% share of the U.S. population, per 2010 US Census. Hispanic and Latino Americans compose 15% of the population, making up the largest ethnic minority.